

VZCZCXRO0592
OO RUEHCHI RUEHCN RUEHHM
DE RUEHML #0515/01 0600554
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 290554Z FEB 08
FM AMEMBASSY MANILA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9932
INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RHHMUNA/CDRUSPACOM HONOLULU HI IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 000515

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/28/2018

TAGS: [MARR](#) [MASS](#) [MCAP](#) [PREL](#) [RP](#)

SUBJECT: ADMIRAL KEATING EMPHASIZES STRONG TIES DURING
VISIT TO PHILIPPINES

REF: MANILA 426

Classified By: Ambassador Kristie A. Kenney for Reasons
1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: During his visit to the Philippines February 25-26, PACOM Commander Admiral Timothy Keating joined the Ambassador to meet with Philippine Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces General Hermogenes Esperon, Jr. and visited a civil-military operations project as part of the annual U.S.-Philippine Balikatan joint military exercise. Admiral Keating reiterated his firm support for the Philippine Armed Forces, emphasizing the strength of the U.S.-Philippine relationship and voicing his commitment to help the Philippines' military reform efforts and their fight against terrorists. The Admiral congratulated Esperon on recent successes, including the discovery of suspected remains of Jemaah Islamiyah terrorist and Bali bomber Dulmatin and the arrest of key Jemaah Islamiyah member Latif. Esperon stressed that despite recent rumblings of instability that could involve military units, the armed forces were firmly in support of constitutional processes as remedies for political disputes and that civil society must shoulder the burden for political reform and not involve the military. General Esperon was effusive in his appreciation for U.S. assistance, including DNA analysis on the possible Dulmatin samples, and highlighted key programs such as noncommissioned officer development, Coast Watch South, and sustaining the newly formed National Development Support Command in securing peace throughout the Philippines. End Summary.

U.S. PLAYING A ROLE IN PHILIPPINE SUCCESSES

¶2. (C) PACOM Commander Admiral Timothy Keating visited the Philippines February 25-26 and joined the Ambassador to meet with Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces of the Philippines Hermogenes Esperon, Jr. to discuss U.S.-Philippine cooperation focused on reforming the Philippine military and improving its ability to defeat terrorists in the south. The Ambassador congratulated General Esperon on weathering a difficult period over the last several weeks when many media reports had suggested that elements of the military might challenge political authority amid continuing calls for President Arroyo to resign (septel). Esperon said that it had been a rough period, but that he was proud of his commanders and the Armed Forces of the Philippines for their commitment to upholding the Philippine Constitution. Esperon said he and his commanders had been saying, "We tell people, 'Why do you want us to intervene? If we intervene, democracy suffers.' We achieved democracy, so let's allow the system to

work. Civil society should take care of itself."

13. (C) Admiral Keating said recent successes, including the arrest of key Jemaah Islamiyah terrorist Latif on February 17 and the recovery of remains suspected to be those of Bali bomber and Jemaah Islamiyah member Dulmatin on February 18 (reftel), point to an ever-improving Philippine capability to locate and interdict terrorist threats. General Esperon agreed the Philippine military was scoring significant hits against terrorists and expressed his gratitude to the Admiral for U.S. military and intelligence assistance, saying "we have a good system in place and are able to react quickly to the information we are receiving. Sometimes the people find it hard to believe in the efficiency of our operations, but they don't realize how well things are working."

14. (C) Citing successes on the islands of Jolo and Sulu, Esperon said that the Philippine military would now begin to focus on Tawi-Tawi island, which was the site of several recent Philippine operations in which Abu Sayaaf Group terrorists and possibly Dulmatin and other Jemaah Islamiyah terrorists were killed. Esperon thanked Admiral Keating and the Ambassador for U.S. assistance in analyzing DNA samples taken from the suspected Dulamatin remains and said he hoped it would yield positive results. The Admiral responded that it was a joint effort between the Philippines and the United States and that it was critical the tests be conducted correctly.

TRAINING STILL NEEDED

15. (C) Esperon went on to highlight key programs such as

MANILA 00000515 002 OF 002

noncommissioned officer development, the border radar system being developed under Coast Watch South, and the strengthening of the newly formed National Development Support Command as vital to the military's long-term success in securing peace throughout the Philippines. With U.S. assistance, the Philippines has established a sergeant-major academy program and is training senior noncommissioned officers to be an integral part of the command structure of the Philippine military. Esperon also thanked Admiral Keating for U.S. support, through 1206 funding, of the Coast Watch South program, which will enhance border security in the southern Philippines through a system of radars, communications, equipment, and patrol assets. Regarding the Philippine military's increasing focus on civil-military operations, Esperon indicated that a top priority was increased resources for the National Development Support Command, which has nationwide responsibility for humanitarian and civil affairs programs to improve the infrastructure and economic conditions in areas prone to terrorist recruitment. Esperon said that the Philippine armed forces were still in need of training to achieve their goals under Philippine Defense Reform, specifically in the areas of procurement and proficiency testing. Esperon added that the Philippines would like to implement a national training and testing program similar to the U.S. military's Combined Arms Readiness Training.

SCHOOL VISIT SHOWCASES CIVIL AFFAIRS COMPONENT OF BALIKATAN

16. (SBU) As part of Admiral Keating's visit, he went with the Ambassador and General Esperon to see a engineering civil affairs project where U.S. Marines from the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit and their Filipino counterparts rebuilt a high school that had been destroyed by fire. The project was conducted as part of the annual U.S.-Philippine Balikatan joint military exercise. Touring the site and meeting some of the 1500 students who had been crowded into inadequate facilities after the fire, Admiral Keating and the Ambassador

briefly took part in some of the refurbishment activities, after which Admiral Keating addressed the students and teachers saying, "Balikatan is of critical importance to us at the United States Pacific Command. It symbolizes the friendship that is the very centerpiece of our strategy throughout the Pacific, and there is no stronger partner for the United States and the United States military than the Republic of the Philippines."

17. (U) Admiral Keating did not have a chance to clear this cable before departing Manila.

Visit Embassy Manila's Classified SIPRNET website:
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eap/manila/index.cfm>

You can also access this site through the State Department's Classified SIPRNET website:
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/>

KENNEY